

What makes a good literature search?

There is a clear description of the topic and the search strategy used

- An explanation of the scope of the literature search with a clear understanding of the implications for searching
- Search topic broken down into main 'facets' or 'concepts'
- Rationale for the approach to searching and techniques used
- Explanation of decisions taken during search process.
- Results examined for relevance and revised as required
- Keep a record of each search

A wide range of relevant databases and sources of information explored

- Attempt to use a wide range of potentially relevant sources

A wide range of relevant search terms employed

- Appropriate use of synonyms
- Wide range of terms
- Imaginative use of synonyms
- Effective use of thesauri/controlled vocabulary if available
- Effective use of keyword index if available

Use of full range of appropriate search techniques

- Wide range of search operations
- Correct use of truncation and wildcards
- Limiting searches by field, if appropriate
- Taking into account alternative spellings
- Using Boolean operators effectively

Relevant references found covering all aspects of the topic or identification of gaps in evidence

If a 'gap' is suspected, has a systematic approach been taken to confirm this?

- Discussion with your supervisor
- Contacting key organisations and experts
- Searching for unpublished and 'grey' literature
- Research being carried out currently that hasn't been published yet

References recorded accurately and consistently

- Consistent use of appropriate citation methods and referencing styles
- OU style, Harvard, Vancouver or as specified by your course/supervisor

Acknowledgement

This checklist has been adapted from 'What make a good literature search', a checklist produced by Rosalind McNally of the National Primary Care Research and Development Centre, University of Manchester.